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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need for teachers to begin with a theoretical framework that prepares them to handle the realities of working with cultural, economic, and language minority students. Two perspectives of cultural pluralism (multicultural education and critical pedagogy) provide such a framework. Although multicultural education lacks a consensual definition and theoretical framework for analysis, it offers much to the content and process of schooling, especially cultural pluralism. Critical pedagogy presents a more in-depth perspective on the structural and contextual forces that impact the educational experiences of students within a culturally pluralistic classroom. It explains how power and politics interact to reinforce social inequalities in the classroom. This perspective views public education as a mechanism that perpetuates the problem of some students making it in the system while others fail, with the classroom becoming the arena that marginalizes such students. Within the context of total school reform, multicultural education and critical pedagogy can overlap. Both help explain how schools cater to the status quo; advocate for students to become critical thinkers capable of examining their own life circumstances to better control their own destinies; and address cultural pluralism within the context of teacher preparation. This framework addresses the needs of both educators and students within the context of schooling. (Contains 35 references.) (SM)

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**Cultural Pluralism:  
The Search for a Theoretical Framework**

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses the need for teachers to begin with a theoretical framework that prepares both the novice and seasoned professionals to handle many of today's harsh realities of working with cultural, economic, and language minority students. Two perspectives of cultural pluralism --multicultural education and critical pedagogy-- provide such a framework for educators.

Although multicultural education lacks a consensual definition and theoretical framework for analysis, this reform movement offers much to the content and process of schooling. Multicultural education presents a fundamental perspective for the need to prepare teachers to work with an increasing population of cultural, economic, and language diverse students. Multicultural education begins to address the question of "what?" by focusing upon much of the content of cultural pluralism.

Critical pedagogy, however, presents a more in depth perspective of the structural and contextual forces that impact the educational experience of students within a culturally pluralistic classroom. With regard to this paper, critical pedagogy answers the question of "why?" by explaining how power and politics go hand-in-hand to reinforce social inequalities in the classroom. Public education is viewed, in this perspective, as a mechanism that perpetuates why some students make it in the system and others do not.. The classroom becomes the arena that marginalizes such students. Many of these students experience cultural, economic, and language barriers that prevent them from operating fully within the mainstream of society.

Moreover, within the context of total school reform, multicultural education and critical pedagogy can overlap. Both seek to explain how schools cater to the status-quo. Both advocate students must become critical thinkers capable of examining their own life circumstances to better control their own destinies. Both perspectives address cultural pluralism within the context of teacher preparation. Perhaps it is here that such a framework may address the needs of both educators and students within the context of schooling.

### **Cultural Pluralism: The Search for a Theoretical Framework**

As the world becomes a more accessible global village, the U.S. population explodes with ever increasing cultural diversity. One of the major institutions that reflects such increasing cultural diversity is our educational system. Here the faces of America are rapidly changing, and this cultural revolution can be seen in demographic trends. According to the Center for Education Statistics (CES) (1987, p. 64), the proportion of non-white students that attended U.S. schools was 24% in 1976; by 1984, that figure rose to 29%. By the year 2000, the number will increase between 30 and 40% (Hodgkinson, 1985). According to Gay (1989), ethnic minorities now surpass the majority student population in 23 of the 25 largest school districts in the country, and in many, the minority population exceeds 75%. These demographic trends reflect a rapidly growing ethnic minority that now constitutes one-third of the nation and is fast becoming the majority in many U.S. states.

Such demographic changes remain daunting on several levels. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in 1987 collected data on education majors who were to enter the teaching profession. According to the AACTE, preservice teachers showed little interest in teaching handicapped, low income, or low ability children (p. xii). Of these preservice teachers, 82% would prefer to teach in a homogeneous suburban or rural school with average students. Furthermore, of the current teaching force, 90% of teachers are Euro-Americans, and in elementary schools, 80% are Euro-American and female (Sleeter & Grant, 1988). The prototype of most teachers today is a White, middle-class female. Often such teachers have not been exposed to cultures other than their own (Grant, 1989). John and Leacock (1979) find that when the background of the teacher is different from the students, the classroom becomes a center of tension and anxiety that is felt by both the teacher and the students. Gay (1989) reflects on this crisis:

Most graduates of typical teacher-education programs know little about cultural traits, behaviors, values, and attitudes different ethnic minority groups bring to the

classroom, and how they affect the ways these students act and react to instructional situations. They [the teachers] do not know how to understand and use the school behaviors of these students, which differ from their normative expectations, as aides to teaching. Therefore, they tend to misinterpret them as deviant and treat them punitively. (p. 177)

Within this mismatch of cultures, the teacher educator can play an important role to find ways to bridge this cultural gap that may exist between many future teachers and the children who will be in their care. Therefore, it is important for teacher educators to begin to address critical problems that too often are found in cultural, economic, and language minority classrooms which reflect fewer resources, more discipline problems, and higher turn-over rate of staff who may feel helpless within the system. Preservice teachers need to be given extensive opportunities through field experiences to become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of diverse populations. Without such understanding and appreciation of the diversity of cultures, learning styles, and teaching strategies, social inequalities will continue to be reinforced in the classroom by unknowing teachers.

This paper explores two perspectives of cultural pluralism: multicultural education and critical pedagogy. Multicultural education presents a fundamental perspective for the need to prepare teachers to work with an increasing population of cultural, economic, and language diverse learners. Multicultural education begins to address the question of "what?" by focusing upon much of the content of cultural pluralism. Critical pedagogy, however, presents a more in depth understanding of the structural and contextual forces that impact the educational experience of students within a culturally pluralistic classroom. With regard to this paper, critical pedagogy answers the question of "why?" by highlighting such classroom dimensions as powerlessness, equality, politics, and conflict. Both perspectives address cultural pluralism within the context of teacher preparation.

## The Search for a Suitable Framework

### Multicultural Education

Multicultural education was barely a reality before 1975. Its predecessors were ethnic, labor, and women's studies in the 1960's. Still in its infancy, multicultural education did not receive immediate approval. Teacher preparation programs operated for a long time on the premise that a teacher who could teach well could teach all children equally well (Gay, 1983). Another stumbling block along the way was the long held belief of the melting pot theory in which all cultures melt away to assimilate into the mainstream (Gay, 1983). Then the 1970's and 1980's brought critical attacks on an educational system that failed to provide for an increasingly diverse population. Thus, multicultural education caught the attention of a profession that was fast caught up in changes that could not be reversed and provided some quick fix solutions to very complex educational problems. It could not, however, provide the systemic solutions that were long overdue.

One of the major criticisms of multicultural education was that it lacked a consensual definition and theoretical assumptions leading to a working framework from which educators could operate. Whether we call multicultural education--multiethnic studies, ethnic studies, bilingual/bicultural education, nonsexist education, human relations, or sex equality--matters little. According to Sleeter and Grant (1988), "Multicultural education has emerged as an umbrella concept that deals with race, culture, language, social class, gender, and handicap" (p. 26). Within all these definitions, multicultural education has come to mean "a reform movement aimed at changing the content and process within schools" (Sleeter and Grant, 1987, p. 421). Banks (1979) defined multicultural education as an "educational reform movement that is concerned with increasing educational equity for a range of cultural and ethnic groups" (p. 32). Bermingham, Sia, and Sydnor (1986) suggested that this reform implies more than studying different cultures. They conclude, "It is also an institutional change within the educational setting in order to accommodate students of diverse ethnic backgrounds" (p. 2). Meyan, Rodriquez, and Erb (1980) state that multicultural education is not a course, one class, or a unit. It is "a way of learning, . . . of teaching" (p. 7). Bermingham et al. (1986) go further stating that multicultural education should be regarded as a philosophy, "as a process which directs the total education enterprise" (p. 2). Gay

(1983) places emphasis on women, handicapped, the aged, and the poor in her definition.

Gollnick and Chinn (1983) emphasize race, class, and gender.

At this point, although one definition does not emerge, it may be helpful to clarify a few underlying assumptions upon which multicultural education rests. Cummings and Bridges (1986) note several well established assumptions:

1. Teacher training programs do not prepare individuals for diverse student populations.
2. Cultural pluralism is an important factor in the make-up of the new reality.
3. Schools and educators play an important role in shaping social behavior and must take a more active and responsible role in celebrating diversity.
4. The whole educational system must be assessed and monitored often to see if multicultural provisions are followed (p. 2).

Bermingham et al. (1986) add several more assumptions:

1. Teachers are mediators of culture as transmitters of societal values.
2. Often it is difficult when teacher and students come from differing cultural backgrounds.
3. As teachers become more prepared for handling culturally diverse classrooms, effectiveness increases.
4. Teacher sensitivity to culturally diverse learning styles helps motivate students to succeed.
5. Multicultural sensitivity in the classroom helps students to be part of the global village (p. 5-6).

Many national organizations, such as The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), have promoted and implemented multicultural standards for accreditation as early as 1977. Many reform groups (The Holmes Group, The Carnegie Forum) and professional organizations (National Council of Teachers of English, National Council for Social Studies), as well as state guidelines (The Wisconsin Administrative Code) have all defined and endorsed multicultural education.

Sleeter and Grant (1988) in *Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class and Gender* classify multicultural education into five helpful categories that range from a conservative approach to the most extreme of total school reform. The five

categories include: Teaching the Culturally Different or the Exceptional Child, Human Relations Approach, Single-Group Studies Approach, Multicultural Education Approach, and Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist Approach... This last classification extends the multicultural education approach into social action that empowers the student and all who participate within the system. This approach advocates total school reform which includes the implementation of a multicultural staff that both reflects and embraces cultural diversity, the elimination of racism, and the removal of Euro-centric practices in curriculum and instruction that reinforce class inequalities. This approach extends the notion of total school reform by educating students to become analytical and critical thinkers capable of examining their life circumstances and social stratification that keeps them and their group from fully enjoying the social, political, and financial successes of the dominant culture. If students are part of the dominant culture, this approach helps them become more critical thinkers, who are capable of seeing the exclusivity that they have acquired in relation to other cultural groups in America. Students learn how to critically participate in shaping and controlling their destiny and how to voice their opinions in shaping and directing their own studies. Students learn social action skills to increase their own chances for success and to work together for the common good. It is within this last classification that multicultural education not only addresses the question of "what" but adds another dimension by addressing the question of "why". It is here that multicultural education crosses over into critical pedagogy.

What has been needed to extend the understanding of cultural pluralism is a conceptual framework for educators to explain why some students make it in the system and others do not. Critical pedagogy offers such a perspective to multicultural education. Critical pedagogy explains how power and politics go hand-in-hand to reinforce social inequalities in the classroom. A growing number of scholars in critical pedagogy are committed to a model that explains the role of the teacher as a cultural transmitter and agent. In this perspective, the role of the teacher becomes one of a critical examiner who observes how schools perpetuate inequalities or how schools could better serve the needs of all students, not just the privileged.

The following discussion on critical pedagogy will be divided into two parts. First, a brief discussion on the relationship between critical pedagogy and multicultural education will be presented. Second, an in-depth look at the contributions of critical pedagogy as a suitable



framework for multicultural education will be explored. Specifically, its questions, purposes, assumptions, and concepts will be examined.

### Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy

Little has been written directly about the relationship between critical pedagogy and multicultural education. Giroux (1988), one of the leading voices of critical pedagogy, offers his thoughts:

Multiculturalism is generally about Otherness (minorities), but is written in ways in which the dominating aspect of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted. . . . As a critical discourse of race and pedagogy, multiculturalism needs to break out of its silence regarding the role it plays in masking how White domination colonizes definitions of the normal. (p. 10)

Giroux (1990) in his essay, "The Politics of Postmodernism," raises three major points that he feels must be embedded into multicultural education:

1. Multicultural education must consider the political underpinning behind any cultural differences in the classroom and classroom practices.
2. Schooling must be seen in a social, political, and racial context.
3. Multicultural education must search for a theoretical framework in which power, politics, and struggle are central issues. (p. 11)

Although Giroux makes several crucial points about the need for multicultural education to be more than a study of otherness versus sameness in his essay, it is clear that Giroux also views multicultural education as falling short of the mark of total school reform.

### Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy provides a conceptual view of inequalities in the classroom within a social, political, and economic context. Often referred to as the new sociology of education, critical pedagogy begins where conflict theory dissipates. Conflict theory states that schools very effectively reinforce class inequalities to their own advantages (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Critical pedagogy goes beyond by giving both teachers and students a theoretical framework and a

language to understand the fundamental relationship of how power and politics play hand-in-hand to effectively reinforce social inequalities in the classroom (Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1988). Giroux (1988, p. xxiv) states that the main theoretical task for critical pedagogy is to "uncover how domination and oppression are produced within the various mechanisms of schooling."

Critical pedagogy asks several questions: Why are an alarming number of students failing even with the good intentions of hard working teachers? Freire and Macedo (1987) ask at what price does a society function without individuals who are critically literate? Regardless of the exact wording, critical pedagogy provides a language to critically examine why many students do not make it in an institution whose role is to produce active, democratic citizens.

Other possible questions may follow: How does society begin to address the problems of urban schools that traditionally have had less money, fewer resources, more discipline problems, more inexperienced teachers, and higher turnover rates among teachers, administrators, and students? How does teacher education begin to address the reality that class inequalities continue to exist and to be reinforced by predominantly Euro-American female teachers who have few experiences with cultures other than their own? Critical pedagogy suggests that by critically studying how schools promote inequality, both teachers and students can begin to engage in meaningful, transformational dialogue.

Critical pedagogues purport several purposes. McLaren (1989, p.16) states that critical pedagogues --such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Maxine Greene, Jane Gaskell, Michael Apple, Roger Simon, Joel Spring, Paul Willis, Tom Popkewitz--generally strive for a dual purpose: "to empower the powerless" and "transform existing social inequalities and injustices." The purpose according to Giroux (1988) is to provide a model for the classroom so that students and teachers can examine the social, political, and economic reasons why some members or groups have all the power and others do not. He sees this as a form of cultural politics. Such understanding gives direction and hope for those that still dream of transforming society.

Several assumptions are reinforced. Critical pedagogy begins deductively with the premise that human beings are not totally free and are part of a society that is filled with contradictions (McLaren, 1989). Critical pedagogy assumes that reality is not made up of isolated events, but is dialectic, contradictory by nature. Critical pedagogy rejects the notion that reality is one-dimensional, fixed or frozen from a ethnocentric, Euro-centric view of the world. Critical theorists

believe that social realities are complex, stemming from a rich variety of socio-economic, cultural perspectives that can no longer be viewed solely from one perspective that seeks to melt away the differences.

To assume that reality is not fixed or frozen but is dialectic automatically creates contradictions. Such an assumption would help the critical educator see how a democratic system would serve the needs of all children--regardless of color, ethnicity, or economics--yet allow many to slip through the cracks. Dialectic thinking may help the critical educator understand how tracking may help those students who have been favored by the system, while others are pulled down. For the critical educator, it is possible to see schooling as a potential for self-reflection, empowerment, and transformation on the part of both the student and the teacher, while understanding that it can just as easily lead to poor self-esteem, powerlessness, and failure (McLaren, 1989).

Critical pedagogy borrows many assumptions from the social-phenomenological approach within sociology in which schooling and classroom interactions are viewed within a theory of a social reality. Meaning is actively constructed and created interactively by individuals within a situation. Within the context of education, knowledge is not seen as a fixed absolute, but as a constructed reality by the student. Within this constructed reality is an ever-changing subjective view of one's role within the microcosm / macrocosm in which she/he participates.

As a methodology, critical pedagogy views the classroom as the place to solve complex social problems including those of multicultural education. The classroom becomes a laboratory for examining society. Within the safety of the microcosm of the classroom, teachers and students critically examine individual and societal roles. Understanding of such roles is the first step to empowerment (McLaren, 1989, p. 5).

Many of the central themes of critical pedagogy can be found in the early writings of John Dewey (1904) and others who helped to form the Progressive Movement. It is those voices who examined the role of education as a preparation for life, the role of democracy in the classroom, the classroom as a microcosm for examining the society-at-large, and the role of schools as agents to produce active citizens.

It is especially difficult to ignore critical pedagogy today. Jerome Bruner (cited in Giroux, 1988) comments on the need for a theory of instruction within education that would account for the great discrepancy between the social, economic, and political advantages of some students:

A theory of instruction is a political theory in the power sense that it derives from consensus concerning the distribution of power within the society--who shall be educated and to fulfill what roles? In the very same sense, pedagogical theory must surely derive from a conception of economics, for where there is a division of labor within the society and an exchange of goods and services for wealth and prestige, then how people are educated and in what number and with what constraints on the use of resources are all relevant issues. (p. 30)

After the brief opening remarks on critical pedagogy, a more in depth discussion is needed from the perspective of how critical theorists view preparing teachers, teachers, students, and schooling. This discussion will be divided as such into these four categories.

### Preparing Teachers

One of the initial concerns of critical pedagogy is when the teacher examines how schools cater to the status-quo. In order to train teachers to be cognizant of inequalities in the classroom, such an awareness must begin in teacher preparation departments across the country. Part of this preparation begins when the preservice student may ask questions, pose problems, critically examine issues, seek to understand the role of power and politics, and formulate a language within a theoretical framework to analyze why some students make it and others do not. If indeed teachers can be agents of social change, it must begin in this preparatory stage.

The nation's current political climate may make it difficult for preservice teachers to be cognizant of societal inequalities. Preservice teachers have spent much of their lives growing-up during the Reagan/Bush years. This new generation of college students have known administrations that have tightened the belt on social welfare programs that help those who live on the margin of the economy. Yet, preservice teachers, who have grown up during this conservative economic era, will need to be prepared to meet the largest populations of cultural, economic, and language minority students since the influx of immigration in the early twentieth century.

One third of our nation's children comprise an at-risk population. What this creates is a mismatch between teacher preparation programs and life in the real classroom. (McLaren, 1989). Teacher preparation programs have attempted too often to manage only the status-quo in education, to hand out fixed solutions to complex problems, to offer few strategies for problems that continue

to plague schools today. Such training does not examine why teachers too often assign lower grades, lower tracks, and lower expectations to the economically disadvantaged (Banks & Banks, 1989). Many programs see the teacher-in-training as an incompetent who must be given teacher-proof solutions (McLaren, 1989). Models of lessons and evaluations are reduced to a series of formulas. The preservice teacher must learn without contact with students until the teaching practicum begins. The preservice teacher who finally enters today's classroom experiences a kind of cultural shock (Grant, 1989).

Culture shock is inevitable for the cadre of student teachers that do not come from economically disadvantaged or cultural minority backgrounds. Student teachers often know little about the cultural backgrounds of many of their students. Rosenfeld (1970, p. 105) observed the realities that student teachers too often face in urban areas, "The student teacher knew nothing about the neighborhood from which the children in her class came. She knew only that she 'did not want to work with 'these' children when she became a regular teacher."

### Teachers in the Profession

Teachers, too, take many problems into the classroom. Teachers have difficulty shedding what took place in university classrooms. Lortie (cited in Giroux, 1988, p. 34) found that "one of the most severe shortcomings of teachers was the subject, idiosyncratic approach to teaching [that] lack[s] a thought out theoretical framework from which to develop a methodology and content . . . to shape, guide, or evaluate their own work."

McLaren (1989) refers to the current climate as the deskilling of teachers. Giroux (1988) equates the professional milieu to a company store. It is not only teacher education that has teacher-proofed the profession. It has permeated all aspects of education. The essential elements of curriculum adopted by many states dictate what can and cannot be taught in each grade. Standardized tests measure student achievement and deny the responsibility of the teacher to decide where students are placed. Recent writings such as *The Closing of the American Mind* (Bloom, 1987) and *Cultural Literacy* (Hirsch, 1987) advocate that knowledge is fixed, and this body of knowledge creates a cultural literacy that is transferable to all students regardless of race, culture, and economics. Teachers become stripped of much of the important decision-making. They are not allowed to analyze those practices that are counter-productive to the growth of children

(Giroux, 1988). The act of technologizing learning produces politically laundered and culturally sterile programs that take away any power that the teacher may hold (McLaren, 1989, 1995).

Cultural mismatch in the classroom is as difficult for the seasoned teacher as the student teacher who experiences culture shock upon entering the classroom. Without understanding the students' home environment, teachers take the perceptions and experiences of language minority, low income, and culturally diverse students less seriously than students in the dominant culture (McLaren, 1989). Spindler (1974) states that teachers often have a conceptual and cultural context that is alien to that of the students. Problems arise when the mismatch occurs between home environment and school environment. McDermott (1974) warns: "A teacher out of phase with students will undoubtedly fail in the politics of everyday life. Rational interaction with the group will hardly be possible. As a result, the teacher will fall back on his formal authority as a teacher, his so-called 'role,' to instruct the children in their classroom" (p. 105).

Critical pedagogues view the teacher as a cultural transmitter and agent. This perspective means that it is important for the teacher to learn as much as possible about the neighborhoods and families of the students. McLaren (1989) discusses the need for awareness on the part of the teacher:

For teachers, this means that we must begin candidly and critically to face our society's complicity in the roots and structures of inequality and injustice. It means, too, that as teachers we must face our own culpability in the reproduction of inequality in our teaching, and that we must strive to develop a pedagogy equipped to provide both intellectual and moral resistance of oppression, one that extends the concept of pedagogy beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and skills and the concept of morality beyond interpersonal relations. (p. 21)

Giroux (1988) sees the role of the teacher-as-intellectual as an important component. The teacher is one who demonstrates reflection and action in a classroom that abhors the perpetuation of cultural, language, and economic barriers to equality. Such a teacher must find strategies to engage all students, must reject pedagogies used to perpetuate the underclass, and must find ways to reinforce the voices of all students. Giroux elaborates:

[I]n order to function as intellectuals, teachers must create the ideology and structural conditions necessary for them to write, research, and work with each



other in producing curricula and sharing power. In the final analysis, teachers need to develop a discourse and set of assumptions that allow them to function more specifically as transformative intellectuals. (p. xxxiv)

According to critical pedagogues, teachers need to analyze their own ideology as critical educators. They must examine their political ideas and assumptions of why certain students make it and others do not. They must learn to examine their curriculum, their texts, their materials, their verbal and non-verbal transactions in the classroom to see how they may be perpetuating inequalities. Teachers must do more than become complacent if they want to be critical and effective educators that serve the needs of all children. Giroux (1988, p. xxxii) states that teachers must develop a new language of critical analysis and possibility that involves everyone. Engaging in meaningful dialogue allows students to go beyond the role of passive receivers where knowledge is transmitted, and into the active role of inquiry and analysis where knowledge is generated. It is here that meaning leads to social transformation.

### Students in the Classroom

In order to understand critical pedagogy better, a brief discussion is needed on why so many students fail in the classroom. Critical pedagogy views the student as playing an active role in the classroom that critically examines the relationship between politics and power. Yet the reality of today's classroom is too often one in which the student becomes the passive observer without actively participating in schooling.

Messages and ascribed roles can also be reinforced by other classmates within the system. McLaren (1989, p. 212) gives a concrete example of how school failure may become a peer group goal: "As a result of their subordinate position, blacks have formed an identity system that is perceived and experienced not merely as different from but in opposition to the social identity of their white dominators." Success in school by some students would then be viewed as giving up all cultural traits. Schools do not have a "preferential option for the poor, the marginalized and disenfranchised" (McLaren, 1995, p. 259). Only the assimilated students would have the possibility of being successful within the such a system.

Perhaps the most significant mechanism for promoting inequality in schools is tracking. Critical pedagogues would say that such sorting assures oppression for some and achievement for

others. Well known is that high ability groups spend more time learning academic content, more time on higher cognitive activities, and more time with interesting methods and materials which result in higher I.Q. and test scores in general. In lower ability groups, more time is spent on discipline, repeating directions, completing repetitious dittos and workbook activities. It is difficult not to ask why there continues to be a disproportionate number of minority students placed in lower-track, special-education, and vocational classes. Often, once the student is tracked in remedial courses, the student remains. Most ethnic minorities, language minorities, and economically disadvantaged students are trained for lower vocational skills while Whites enroll more often in vocational courses that offer "managerial training, business finance, and general industrial arts skills" (Banks & Banks, 1989). Few ethnic minorities are represented in college preparatory and gifted/talented programs. Labeling and tracking widen the gap.

Critical pedagogues reject the notion that the blame should be placed on the student. Understanding and critically examining why schools teach to the dominant culture and ignore others is the focus of critical pedagogues.

### Role of Schooling

Critical pedagogy becomes increasingly important in today's classroom where children from a variety of cultural, language, and socio-economic backgrounds come together. The most important role of schooling from the perspective of critical pedagogy is to give students opportunities to become self-empowered.

Giroux (1988, p. xxxiii) breaks down the mission of schooling into two important elements: "schools as democratic public sphere" and "teachers as transformative intellectuals." He suggests that one must first begin with the question: What is the purpose of schooling? Schools as democratic public spheres are devoted to self and social empowerment where students learn to become active citizens. Giroux's notion of democracy is similar to Dewey's. Giroux's view of democracy concentrates on the theory and practice that "provide the ideological and material conditions necessary to educate a citizenry in critical literacy and civic courage" (p. 2).

Giroux (1990) adds that part of empowering the classroom involves developing a theory of racism. Racism too often is reduced to a policy issue in schools and universities. Giroux argues that since racism is learned, it becomes a pedagogical issue as well. As a "historical and social



construction," schools must find ways to combat racism from more than a stance of policy (p. 6).

Freire's view (Freire & Macedo, 1987) overlaps Giroux's view of schooling as a social sphere devoted to empowerment. Like Dewey and other Progressives, Freire believes that schooling should prepare students for the society-at-large. Freire further views schooling from a theoretical framework in which students learn to critically analyze their reality and the realities of others. It is here that the cultural background of students becomes a positive force in the classroom instead of a negative one. Applying the lessons and activities of the classroom to the larger society reinforces students to take active roles in transforming society.

Based upon the literature, it can be concluded that schools today reduce the roles of all of their players. Today's role of teacher as the giver of knowledge and student as the passive receiver make it difficult for teachers and students to engage in any meaningful dialogue that would empower both teacher and student. Without meaningful dialogue, teachers must too often cling to teacher-proof methods that ignore the responsibility of critically examining how schools promote inequality. Such practices do not allow students to participate fully in a system that could prepare them to take more active roles in a social democracy.

### Theory-into-Practice

One critical model that has taken theory-into-practice is found in the work of Paulo Freire. Named for the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, has taken theory-into-action by developing literacy programs for many urban and rural community-based organizations as well as many third world nations in Latin America and Africa. Freire's model of literacy begins with the power of the word in relation to dialogue, discourse, and real world concerns. Thus, language holds power and meaning in which one can examine their thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and experiences. Several critical theorists have specifically applied his work to the college classroom (Shor, 1987; Finlay & Faith, 1987; Fiore & Elsasser, 1987). Several organizations in the United States have applied Freire's model of literacy particularly to the Hispanic Literacy Council in Chicago, Bronx Educational Services, Union Settlement House, and Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers in Los Angeles. (For further information on Freire's model (1968) of critical literacy-into-action, please see his monumental work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.)

## Conclusion

Teachers need to begin with a theoretical framework that prepares them as future professionals to handle many of today's complex realities of working with cultural, economic, and language minority learners. Although multicultural education lacks a consensual definition and theoretical framework for such an analysis, this reform movement offers much to the content and process of schooling (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Banks, 1996). To some, multicultural education emphasizes certain groups (Gollnick & Chinn, 1983); others (Banks, 1996; Meyan et al., 1980; Birmingham et al., 1986; Bridges, 1986) emphasize that multicultural education goes beyond a study of different cultures to include a movement of total school reform.

Critical pedagogy, as a theoretical framework, provides a more political context to analyze the complex social problems that exist within the institution of public education. Public education is viewed as a mechanism that perpetuates why some students make it in the system and others do not. In this way critical pedagogy provides a framework to explain how schools serve only the interests of the status-quo. As a framework, critical pedagogy helps both teachers and students develop an awareness of such inequalities (within the school as a microcosm of society), understand why such inequalities exist, and encourage methods to critically examine the role of the individual in relation to others. The teacher is viewed as a cultural transmitter or agent. However, the teacher also has the potential to serve as a critical examiner who helps students analyze such roles in the classroom. Much of critical pedagogy concentrates on the emancipation of students and teachers by examining the socio-political relationships in the classroom.

Within the radical context of total school reform, multicultural education and critical pedagogy overlap. Both seek to explain how schools cater to the status-quo. Both advocate students must become critical thinkers capable of examining their own life circumstances to better control their own destinies (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Both advocate that educators formulate a pedagogical theory with regard to the political, economic, and social realities. Both address cultural pluralism within the context of teacher preparation. Multicultural education, specifically, begins to address the question of "what?" by focusing upon much of the content of cultural pluralism. Critical pedagogy answers the question of "why?" by explaining how power and politics go hand-in-hand to reinforce social inequalities in the classroom. Perhaps it is this overlap that such a framework may address the needs of both educators and students within the context of schooling.

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